



Effective Note-Taking

Lecture styles vary greatly from speaker to speaker. Some lecturers are beautifully organized, some ramble, some present an hour of anecdotes and leave the student to determine their significance.

It is imperative that you figure out a lecturer's style. In the case of the rambler or story teller, you may find yourself at the end of an hour with only a sentence or two written down. Check with other students, but don't be surprised if it works out that your sentences do, indeed, represent the crucial points of the lecture.

Purposes of Note-Taking

1. In order to take efficient notes, the student is forced to listen carefully and critically to what is being said.
2. Taking notes aids comprehension and retention. Personal notes in one's own writing are easier to understand and remember than textbook material.
3. Lecture notes should represent a concise and complete outline of the most important points and ideas, especially those considered most important by the professor.
4. Lecture notes clarify ideas not fully understood in the text or elaborate on things that the text mentions only briefly.
5. Lecture notes combined with notes from textbook material are an excellent source of review. They provide a gauge to what is important in the textbook.

A frequent complaint of students is that they are unable to determine during the lecture what is important and what might just as well be left out. These students may attempt to write down every word uttered by the professor, combining page after page of isolated facts and details but missing a more general understanding of the material, as they are too busy writing to listen. The following are some suggestions to aid the student in taking efficient lecture notes.

Before the Lecture

The single most important thing you can do is to *read* or *skim the text* prior to attending the lecture. This will enable you to:

1. Get the general overview of main ideas, secondary points, and important concepts. Listen with understanding and determine what is relevant and irrelevant.

2. **Identify familiar terms with unfamiliar terms and concepts.**
 - a. Look up the terms before class.
 - b. Listen for an explanation during the lecture.
 - c. Ask the professor or TA for an explanation.
3. **Note portions of the material which are unclear.**
 - a. Listen for an explanation during the lecture.
 - b. Develop questions to ask in class.
4. **Look for other gaps in information which should be clarified or filled in.**

During the Lecture

1. Structure and Organization.

Each student should develop his own method of taking notes, however, the following suggestions may be helpful.

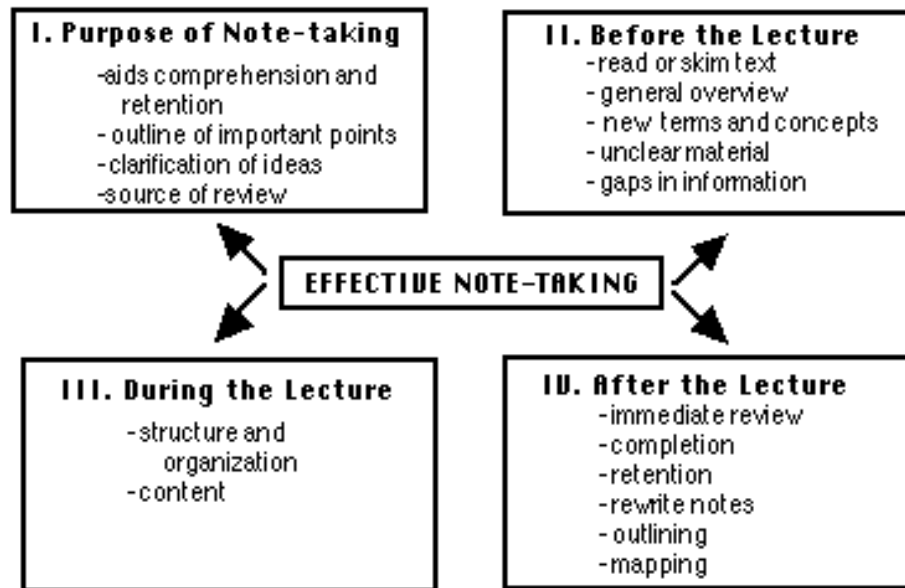
1. **Keep a separate section of your notebook or binder for each course.** If there are several types of notes for one course, such as lecture notes, notes on outside readings, and computation of problems, you may want to arrange them on opposite pages for purposes of cross-reference.
2. **Notes for each lecture should begin on a new page.** This makes for a greater legibility and allows for more freedom in organization.
3. **Date your lecture notes and number all pages.**
4. **Make your notes brief.**
 - a. Never use a sentence when you can use a phrase, or a phrase when you can use a word.
 - b. Use abbreviations and symbols wherever possible.
5. **Put most notes in your own words.** However, the following should be noted exactly:
 - a. Formulae
 - b. Definitions
 - c. Specific facts
6. **Note your lecturer's chief pattern.** S/he may be summarizing the text and highlighting important points, or trying to draw relationships between new and previous understandings. S/he may expect you to get the textbook material on your own while he discusses related outside material.
 - a. If s/he is highlighting the text, take down explanations and examples. Seeing a concept stated in more than one way can help you understand it.
 - b. If s/he draws relationships and asks questions, note the questions and answers. If s/he doesn't give the answers, try to find them after class.
7. **Don't worry about outlining, but use indentations to distinguish between major and minor points.** Numbers and letters may be added later if you wish. However, if the lecturer says s/he will make four or five points, list four or five causes, etc., be sure to use numbers as a check on having taken them all down.
8. **Note down unfamiliar vocabulary and unclear areas.** If the lecturer discusses something you don't understand, take it down as best and as completely as you can. Then you can check with the text or at least know what questions to ask if getting help from someone else. If your instructor knows *just what* you don't understand, s/he's in a position to help you.
9. **If you should miss something completely, leave a blank space and get it later.**
10. **Use margins for questions, comments, notes to yourself on unclear material, etc.**

11. **Develop a code system of note-marking to indicate questions, comments, important points, due dates of assignments, etc. This helps separate extraneous material from the body of notes and also helps point out areas which are unclear. Margins are excellent places for coded notations. Some suggested codes are:**
 - ? - not clear at time of lecture
 - Imp. or ! - important
 - Q - questions
 - * - assignment
 - C - comment(student's own)
 12. **Attempt to differentiate fact from opinion.**
2. **Content.**
1. **Notes should include all main ideas and enough subordinate points to clarify understanding.**
 2. **All formulae, rules, definitions, and generalizations should be included.**
 3. **Inclusion of the speaker's illustrations and examples may help clarify concepts when notes are reviewed.**
 4. **Marginal notes facilitate speedy location of specific items.**
 5. **Instructors usually give clues as to what is important to take down:**
 - a. **previews and summaries**
 - b. **material written on blackboard, other visual aids**
 - c. **repetition**
 - d. **vocal emphasis**
 - e. **questions asked of the class**
 - f. **word clues: four causes of; four aspects of; therefore; in conclusion; and so we see; hence; in a like manner; on the other hand; however; cause-effect; relationships; etc.**

After the Lecture

1. **Go over your notes *as soon as possible* after the lecture.**
 1. **Clear up illegibilities in writing, check for errors, fill in further facts and examples while the lecture is still fresh in your mind. At this point you should clear up misunderstandings or fill in missing information by consulting the lecturer, TA, classmates, the texts, or additional readings.**
 2. **Immediate review is *essential* to retention. Unless you review within 24 hours after lecture or at least before the next lecture, retention will drop sharply and you will be *relearning* rather than *reviewing*.**
 3. **Merely recopying notes without thinking about or revising them does not necessarily aid retention. A more helpful practice is to manipulate the material by reorganizing it and putting it in your own words. For a well-organized lecture, an outline can suffice, but in the case of material where important ideas and relationships are scattered throughout, there is a technique called mapping which can be very useful in restructuring and putting together the relevant points. The use of this technique forces you to critically evaluate material in terms of main ideas, secondary points, and details, and to structure this content in an organized and coherent fashion. Relationships must be observed and established, irrelevant material may be excluded. This can be one of the most efficient means of immediate review for optimal retention.**

See below for an example of "mapping"



Mapping Notes.